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FIRST WHOLE BLOOD BANK ABOARD SHIP SAVED LIVES AT GUAM

Aboard a U. S. Navy Hospital Ship -- Delayed. All the members of this ship's company were aware of the importance of the bottled life she carried to Guam. It was not a new experience for the crew...there had been Kwajalein, Eniwetok, and more recently Saipan. These past operations had demonstrated the quantities of whole blood and plasma needed to fight death among our casualties. Combat Medical Officers had seen evidence that transfusion of whole blood, and of plasma, were front-line warriors in the battle for life.

Vast medical storehouses at hospital bases behind combat areas had provided stocks to replenish dwindling plasma supplies following previous actions. The same was true this time. But fulfilling needs for whole blood was an entirely different problem. In two trips in as many weeks to Saipan, over 200 transfusions had been contributed by the hospital ship's crew. Now, with Guam, and the certain need for additional quantities of whole blood but a few days removed, something had to be done to assure a new source of supply.

In the past the distances that lay between advanced bases and new combat areas had eliminated the transportation of whole blood by sea. With this knowledge, Captain John T. Bennett, Medical Corps, U.S.N., Hattiesburg, Mississippi, the ship's Medical Officer, made a decision that was to save many lives. That decision created the first known blood bank to be water-borne to the fighting front aboard a hospital ship.

Success of this experiment depended on the ability of living blood to survive disturbances created by vibrating ship's engines and the rolling and pitching of the ship. It was known that ashore, under proper conditions, whole blood could be kept for as long as 10 days. Its life at sea was something to be determined.

With the decision made, the Commanding Officer of shore garrisoned Marines at an advanced base in the Marshall Islands, where the ship lay at anchor, was consulted. The Medical Officer asked for 100 volunteers. Over 300 men from the small Marine garrison responded. One hundred were selected, came aboard, gave their blood, and assured a rich, floating blood bank. The following morning the ship was underway with her precious cargo and anxious hopes for the success of the experiment.

Officers and men were determined that the blood should reach the fighting front ready for use. Its condition was the concern of everyone. All hands cooperated to see that the ship...carrier for the vital blood...was handled with care. They fully realized the fragility of their cargo.

The success of their efforts can now be seen. American fighting men who came aboard seriously wounded took the road to recovery. At Guam there was ample whole blood for required transfusions. No wounded fighting man went without whole blood if it was required.

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